



Episodes 12 & 13 Turning *Little Stones* show notes

Lauren from Suffolk Wildlife Trust talks about how she encourages children and their families to explore a Heathland Reserve.

Out & About (2)...

Heathland Adventures with

Lauren Mack

This is the second of our Out & About series. Episode 5 (Woodland Adventures) is still available to listen to. This time we are in Heathland at the start of Winter.

We recorded this podcast on site after a session of Wild Tots. Lauren's enthusiasm and passion for introducing young families (babies through to teens) to Knettishall Heath, one of several sites managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust. It is a large site of important heathland.

Lauren's work as a Wild Learning Officer (such a cool job title!) gives her first-hand experience of seeing the fantastic benefits for everyone of simply being Out & About in Nature.

The space and activities

Lauren makes sure that there are regular go-to activities that Wild Tots can access easily. She adds a new activity each session to provide seasonal interest. Once she has set the activities up, she leaves the children to follow their fascinations...

Today, there were areas set out for:

Reading (a cosy space with a picnic blanket, seasonal books and soft toys)



Creative spaces (Including a music mat with a variety of instruments and a clear tarpaulin 'canvas' for painting)



Bugs (positioned near the bug hotel, with soft paintbrushes and magnifying pots, identification charts and some plastic bugs hidden around the space to ignite interest)

Small world play areas (including a mud kitchen & building site – with diggers, logs on a 'site' of mounded up leaf litter)



Other (including a low-strung hammock, chiffon scarfs wafting in the breeze around the site, a weir allows water-based activities, open areas for wild grazing ponies, a tunnel/mound to scramble through and climb over)



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A Shared Experience

Within this space, children follow their own interests and fascinations. Carers and parents are encouraged to join in without taking over.

The attending adults have chosen to bring their children to the sessions, suggesting they are already 'converts'. But Lauren explains that adults too gain much from the sessions. One parent explained that they have built a mud kitchen in their garden, other adults were as engaged as the children in finding bugs under logs and softly brushing them into pots to take a closer look.

Lauren is keen to make sure there are no barriers to families attending the sessions. For example, families are not required to pay for a set of sessions, she has spare outdoor clothing for children who may need a change or be wearing something more suitable for that day's activity.

She loves to see families visiting the heathland when there are no sessions...

The benefits of being Out & About in the heathland...

These are too numerous to name and far broader than ticking off areas of development. Lauren names a few...

Physical development both gross and fine motor movements...clambering & climbing, working scoops & gently brushing bugs...

Social development is seen in cooperative play, turn taking, confidently showing a visitor the site and explaining what to do...

Creative development (making music while the mud pie cooks, extending story in play...)

Language rich... (children name millipedes and centipedes spontaneously and confidently...).

Problem solving & sorting

History... the passing of the seasons...

Children learn to care for the environment (where to return the bugs; it is their habitat!). The children are involved clearing the site at the end of the session...

Enjoying the heathland reserve

Lauren's motivation is seeing children of all ages enjoy the reserve.

She works with children and young people across age ranges (Wild Babies, Wild Tots with their parents, to Primary Activities and their teachers to Young teenage Wardens).

She explains that it's not about 'teaching', but more about going outdoors and seeing possibilities that our children will find in Nature.



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For information about Wild Tots across Suffolk Wildlife Trust, visit

www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org/events/wildtots

& Facebook pages for each site.

Check out the websites for other Wildlife Trusts for similar activities/events across the UK

Further information practical guidance and advice are available through

Turning Little Stones

Delving a little Deeper

See website for details.